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## 2. Resources of the Niger as regards legitimate Trade.

(Extract from a Letter from Commodore WILMOT, H.M.S. *Rattlesnake*, to the Commander-in-Chief of the Cape Station, dated 9th December, 1863.)

"Lieutenant Gambier ascended in the steamer as far as Egga, about 360 miles from the entrance of the river. From thence he advanced a further distance of 5 miles in his boats, and entered a small river, up which he went 50 miles to a village called Wunagi, 7 miles from Beda, the capital of King Massaba. Dr. Baikie accompanied him.

"At Wunagi they were met by King Massaba's messengers, who informed them that horses would be sent down for their conveyance to his town.

"The name of the river is not given in any chart, neither has it been surveyed. It will be well to call it by some name connected with this year's expedition. It is about 300 yards across in the broadest part, and from 30 to 40 in its narrowest part. Depth unknown; but Lieutenant Gambier thinks it to average quite 2 fathoms.

"The banks are thick with mangrove, and a few trees; but the country is well cultivated, yielding Indian corn and yam. There is also the 'butter-tree,' which is about 10 feet high, and produces 'shea butter,' which is used by the natives for food and for greasing their bodies. There is plenty of cotton, red and white, and large quantities might be grown. At every village cotton was brought down for sale.

"The country seems well populated with much of the same description of people as in other parts of Africa. All were very friendly, and anxious for trade.

"The soil appears to be most fertile; cotton, Indian and Guinea corn, cassava, date-palm, yams, &c., growing in great abundance. The yams are superior to those of most places on the coast; and the climate from all accounts is very healthy, a fresh breeze blowing up from the sea.

"There are partridges and guinea-fowl, also elephants and buffaloes, in the neighbourhood.

"Dr. Baikie came on board at Lukoja, his own place about 220 miles up; and was greatly rejoiced to see the *Investigator*, as his supplies were exhausted, and he had given up all hopes of being relieved this year.

"The missionaries were all landed at those places where they had missions, embarking again when the *Investigator* returned. . . . .

"From the entrance of the Niger to Egga, a distance of 360 miles, the average depth in the rainy season is between 4 and 5 fathoms, excepting in one part of the ship-channel, which has only 10 feet. This, of course, makes it impossible for vessels drawing more water to proceed further than this shallow part, which is about 200 miles up.

"There is another passage on the other side of the island, near which this 10-foot channel is, which has not yet been surveyed; and Lieutenant Gambier thinks it highly probable that a deep channel may be found there.

"My opinion, formed upon the information I have been able to obtain, is that it would well repay one Company to take the trade of the Niger into its own hands, encouraged and assisted by a yearly subsidy from the Government, until the trade is regularly and permanently established, and certain profits arise.

"After this it would be, of course, for Her Majesty's Government to rescind the charter and do away with the monopoly, as they think proper.

"It appears that this single 10-foot channel mentioned above, is the only obstacle, excepting the river-bar, to vessels of large draught of water navigating the river, after passing the bar, and taking in their cargoes 300 miles up.

"This is a very serious obstacle, but can be overcome by steamers of light draught towing up large cargo boats, or hulks of a considerable size. The bar is another drawback to vessels drawing much water. There is only 12 feet on it in the rainy season.

"A Company must therefore be prepared to enter upon their work with two powerful paddle-wheel steamers drawing when loaded 9 feet of water, which is only one foot less than the depth of the channel in its shallowest part, with a good supply of cargo-boats or other conveyances, as they may deem expedient for river-work.

"The ship to receive the cargo must be at anchor outside the bar. These steamers should be armed with one heavy and one light gun, also a proportion of small-arms, rockets, &c., in case of necessity. They should be very fast, well ventilated, and carry at least 100 tons of coal. A depôt of coal must be in the river at the best selected place, and wood can be obtained very cheap. I should say that steamers with two rudders would be the best, which will prevent the necessity of turning.

"At first some little difficulty will doubtless arise, which must be expected; but the enterprise of British merchants, backed up by the energy and skill of British seamen, will conquer every obstacle, and establish a trade in the Niger that will fully satisfy, in a few years, every one that is really interested in the happiness and prosperity of this part of Africa."

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